

SEPTEMBER 24, 1981

Fall rains have blended into the late summer showers. Reports vary as to amounts, yet most of the Shortgrass Country shows promise of growing winter feed.

In our area, Goat Whiskers the Younger and one of our other neighbors are the leading weather stations. During the last of August and the first week of this month, they reported rains that exceeded the first four-day entries from the logbook of Noah's Ark. At the rate the clouds were dumping on them every afternoon, it sounded like their cattle needed to be drifted to the hilltops to escape the floodplains. I expected any of those wet days to see the San Angelo Emergency Corps rushing to the scene to rescue victims.

However, not any of that happened. In fact, on the spot observers such as the hands that kept working sheep during these cloudbursts were much more conservative in their reports.

Some of the four-inch measurements that were aired over our ranch radio system turned out to be closer to the more modest four-tenths of an inch that is normally a top-range figure for our section. Some time ago I'd noticed that Goat Whiskers the Younger was sending out some mighty bullish rain reports. On rainy days, we are always in closer radio contact, as we are both prone to making dead-end trips through mud holes.

I began to realize that Whiskers was either reading his gauges in his helicopter, or had a special telescope rigged up that made checking them possible from his headquarters. He'd come on the air about every five minutes with measurements that were two hours apart in travel time. In one sequence, he'd be saying, "Man, it's rained four inches down here at the Wilson mill." In the next five minutes or so, he'd come on with a full three inches over at his Kite pasture. By my calculations he was averaging close to 85 miles an hour on his ranch roads and hurdling the fences to keep from stopping at the gates.

The reason the moisture varies so much in the small locales is from the differences in heights of the rain gauges in regards to the height and distance the measurements are taken. For instance, looking down off a horse gives one perspective and squatting down or bending down gives another.

The best judge of calves' weights that ever lived in this country was a guy named "Shorty" that had the same level of vision as a five-weight steer. Shorty was a wizard on those baby beef type cattle of the '40s. He'd have made a million dollars in six-packs alone if the trend in cattle hadn't switched to stretchy, long legged calves. I never did know where he ended up after the change. He probably had to move off to the swamplands of the South where yearlings and calves don't grow so tall and rangy.

All day yesterday, blue grey clouds floated over the ranch. The moon last night was obscured by cathedral-like thunderheads that flashed lightning and rumbled thunder in the blackness. No more than a few drops fell at the ranch or in Mertzon. I am waiting this morning to hear what happened at the Whiskers outfit. The radio must be dead because normally by this hour the reports are in on yesterday's flooding.